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ABSTRACT

This booklet shows parents how to help their children develop a number of strategies for understanding words by working together on a methodical, 12-week program of word study. Sections of the booklet describe the program week by week. The techniques described are: Read and Use Context; Search for Synonyms, Antonyms, Homonyms; Learn Important Prefixes; Let Word Endings Help (Suffixes); Learn Groups of Related Words; Discover the Power of Word Analogies; Use Word Maps to Define Words; Use Roots for Basic Meanings; Grow through Word Families; Find Specific Words; Mine the Wealth of Other Languages; and Use the Dictionary and Thesaurus. (RS)

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EXPAND

Your Child's Vocabulary

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A Twelve-Week Plan

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Carl B. Smith, Ph.D.

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Expand Your Child's Vocabulary

A Twelve-Week Plan

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Building Vocabulary for Success

By focusing on one area of learning, can you

. . . raise your child's IQ?

. . . boost your child's success in school?

. . . improve your child's job opportunities?

The answer is *yes!* And that one area is vocabulary — good old straightforward words. Though there are certainly other reasons for success, studies show that IQ test scores, school grades, and job status are linked to vocabulary size. People with higher IQ's, with better grades, and with more desirable jobs have larger vocabularies than those with lower grades and less desirable jobs.

These studies should not surprise us. Ideas and nuances of meaning are expressed with words. The more words you have at your fingertips, the more precise you can be in presenting your ideas. In school and in the business world, you are usually evaluated on your ability to present your ideas clearly. For jobs in an increasingly information-intense society, the pressure for precise expression will grow.

Building vocabulary, then, becomes the most concrete means you have to improve your children's ability to express and clarify their ideas. By sharpening their

vocabulary skills they gain control over school subjects, workplace issues, and the world of ideas in general. That's the reason that the strategies in this book are so important to you and your children. Each of the techniques has the potential of expanding your children's vocabulary. Altogether, these vocabulary-building techniques can easily double the average child's vocabulary.

If we were to boil down this book into one word, it would be *curiosity*. You and your children need to become more and more curious about words, their meanings, their power, their ability to give you control over your world of information.

Your children's teachers may be using some of the same techniques that you find in this book. Why don't you talk with the teachers and ask for advice on ways to connect vocabulary development in school with the informal work that you do at home? Extensive reading remains the best informal means that we know for building a rich vocabulary. By encouraging reading, by using the techniques in this book and by working with teachers, you will increase your children's curiosity about words and their vocabulary-building skills. Curiosity and skills will pay big dividends now and in the future.

Introduction

> *...the range and depth of a person's vocabulary is the best single index of his mental development. Developing a rich vocabulary is not chiefly a matter of looking up words in the dictionary. On the contrary, a rich vocabulary comes basically from experiences and from the organizing and reorganizing of these experiences.*
>
> Dale and O'Rourke
> *Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary*, p. 2

As a parent, you can provide experiences that enable your child to build a larger vocabulary. In particular, you can work with your child on a methodical program of word study. Such a program will help your child develop a number of *strategies* for understanding words. This little booklet will show you how.

In the early years, children acquire a basic speaking and listening vocabulary. They learn words spoken by family and playmates, and they learn words that relate to things they see or touch or smell or taste. This may be described as a *survival vocabulary*, one that contains the words used every day to satisfy basic needs and to talk to other people.

Because you want your child to thrive, not just to survive, you can take advantage of daily opportunities to increase your child's vocabulary bank account. You can build on the child's basic vocabulary in order to make word power a fundamental means for your child

to exhibit competence in school and in social conversation. Newspapers, magazines, and books give you many interesting words to talk about. Some of these words will be new and unfamiliar, while others will be only vaguely understood because they represent things the child may not have experienced directly. Talk about these words and show that they interest you.

As you work with your child, keep these principles in mind:

(1) Words are made up of individual components, and each component contributes to meaning.

(2) These components are arranged in logical patterns to form longer words.

(3) Many words can be organized into groups that are related in meaning.

The techniques in this book should be adapted to the age and experience of your child. If you sense that your child will not benefit from a particular technique, move to another one. By the time he reaches the intermediate grades, all of these techniques should be useful. Don't limit yourself to the words included in this book. Search for others that fit the pattern of each week.

Of the various ways to use these vocabulary techniques, the one most likely to produce long-term results is a week-by-week plan. Each week, focus on one of these techniques, applying it throughout the week as natural opportunities arise. At the first of the following week, shift to the next technique and give it primary attention while reapplying the technique from the preceding week. You may want to omit or combine some of them, depending on your child's abilities.

This approach offers the advantage of ample practice opportunities for each technique. Your interaction with your children will then be more relaxed and will

allow the technique to become a learned response to vocabulary growth. You may also discover at the end of the twelve weeks that your child's vocabulary has grown by a surprising degree and that curiosity about words will assure continued expansion in the years ahead.

Week 1

Read and Use Context

Start this twelve-week program to a larger vocabulary at its richest source—reading books. As your children read, have them keep a list of the words they want to learn and encourage them to figure out the words from context if they can.

When children read a story or a selection in a school textbook, they will occasionally encounter words that are unfamiliar. Clues to the meaning of such words are sometimes provided by **context**; that is, information in the surrounding sentences may help the reader understand a new word. Although context will not always clarify the meaning of an unfamiliar word, it is important for children to look at any new word as part of the entire passage they are reading.

❖ Look for Signals

Point out that writers can use certain cues or signals to indicate that a word is going to be defined. For example, the colon (:) may introduce a passage that explains a word mentioned earlier in the sentence. This mark may also be used to introduce lists of things that help to define or elaborate on a word. In such cases, the colon often stands for the words "as follows."

> In the microscope we saw that the drop of water contained many *bacteria:* one-celled organisms that are too small to be seen by the eye alone.
>
> Three things contribute to the *efficiency* of the new airplane: its light weight, its small size, and its ability to land on short runways.

Other signals are given by words such as "that is" or "for example" or "for instance." These words let you know that more information is going to be given.

> One symptom of the disease is *lethargy;* **that is,** a feeling of sluggishness and a lack of alertness.
>
> Several of the replacement parts were found to be *defective.* **For example,** some had been broken in shipment and others were poorly constructed.

You won't always find these obvious clues to let you know that a word is being defined by context. Look at the next example:

> Susan's ninth birthday party was the best she had ever had. There were plenty of hats and noisemakers, and the room was filled with balloons and streamers. Everyone had a great time on this *festive* occasion.

These sentences tell of an enjoyable party and of a room filled with balloons and party decorations. This context suggests that *festive* means "joyful, happy, glad, merry." Your child may already know the word *festival*

and be able to connect the two forms of the word; you may also want to show that *feast* is related. Even though there is no direct indication (such as a colon or the words "that is"), your child should realize that the second sentence contributes to the meaning of *festive* in the last sentence.

Here is another example showing how context can help to define a word, even though the connection between the two sentences is not clearly signaled:

> The small animal was startled by the noise. It ran back into its *lair* until the danger passed.

These sentences suggest that a *lair* is a place in which an animal can hide when it is frightened. Other terms such as *den* or *hiding place* also help to clarify the meaning of the new word.

Especially in subject areas such as science or social studies, readers will often find that new words are emphasized and defined as soon as they are introduced:

> Scientists warned that the volcanic eruption might cause a *tsunami:* a powerful ocean wave that can do great damage.

> Centuries ago, most people believed that the earth was the center of the universe. They also believed that the earth must be *stationary* in space because they never felt it move.

> The *drought* had caused enormous damage. After months without rain, all the crops had withered and died.

In these examples, the words *tsunami* and *stationary* and *drought* are explained in the surrounding text. Help your child look for cues which show that a word is being explained. We already mentioned that the colon often indicates that more information about a word (such as *tsunami*) will follow. Also point out that cues such as the word *because* in the second example often

indicate that further explanation is to follow: *stationary* refers to something that does not move.

❖ Infer from Examples

In other situations the new word may not necessarily be defined, but its meaning can be *inferred* from context. In the next example, the new word is followed by sentences that give examples of what it means.

> Ozzie was the most *cantankerous* pig in the barnyard. He never ate his spinach, and he never did his homework without a lot of squealing. Whenever his mom said it was time for a mud bath, he always climbed a tree and hid in the branches. He wouldn't play with the other little pigs, and he wouldn't keep his shoelaces tied. Worst of all, he told his little sister that she was too skinny.

In this example, be sure to point out that the whole paragraph demonstrates that the word *cantankerous* means "difficult or irritating to deal with."

For the mature reader, the next paragraph does clarify the meaning of the word *paleontologist*. However, younger readers may not make the connection right away.

> Ed has always been interested in prehistoric animals. He especially likes to read about the ways scientists can figure out the age of extinct animals by studying fossils. Ed wants to be a *paleontologist* when he grows up.

Use the information in this paragraph to help your child form a definition of *paleontologist*: "a scientist who studies the fossils of extinct animals." This can be confirmed by checking the dictionary, where you will probably find that the main entry is *paleontology*. This is indeed "the branch of science that studies fossils and extinct forms of life." Make sure your child understands that *palentology* is the branch of science itself; a *paleon-*

tologist is someone who specializes in it. You can refer to other pairs of related words such as *science* and *scientist* or *art* and *artist*. It would be wise to make sure of the meaning of *prehistoric*, *fossil*, and *extinct*, if necessary. This process helps children to expand their understanding of *paleontologist* and to clarify the meaning of related words as well.

In cases such as these, the reader must discover the meaning of a word by relating other information to it. This use of inference is an important part of getting meaning from context. As students mature, they should be able to infer more and more from the surrounding text when they encounter unfamiliar words.

Please remember that younger children may not always see connections that are obvious to you. Even if the meaning of a word seems to be clear in context, do not assume that it is equally clear to your child. Show how concepts and word meanings work together to clarify the meaning of a word that may be unfamiliar.

Many words in the English language have a variety of meanings; context will suggest which of these meanings applies. Just look in a dictionary to see the number of entries for words such as *go* or *run*, for example. By paying close attention to context, we can tell which definition applies in each case.

run (verb)

They **run** every morning for exercise.
(to move quickly; faster than a walk)

The lawn mower will **run** better if you oil it.
(to operate or work)

Buses **run** every hour from here to Boston.
(to travel regularly)

They **run** a gift shop in the mall.
(to operate, be in charge of)

run (noun)

I took the dog for a long **run** last night.
(the act of running)

The play had a **run** of almost a year.
(a period of time during which something happens repeatedly)

There was a big **run** on purple socks at the store.
(a sudden demand)

This ski **run** is very popular.
(a steep path or track)

Although context may not always give a complete definition, it does provide a good starting point. Furthermore, when words have more than one meaning, we *must* look at context before we go to a dictionary. This is the only way we can tell which definition fits the passage we are reading.

Even if your child does use context to figure out a new word, this does not mean that the word will be remembered or made a part of everyday vocabulary. If words encountered in reading are important enough to be added your child's vocabulary, then they should be studied more extensively, using the strategies discussed in the following weeks.

Seeing a word and its definition only one time will not enable your child to learn it as a productive word. An unfamiliar word must be used repeatedly until it becomes part of the child's vocabulary.

Search for Synonyms, Antonyms, Homonyms

During the second week shift your attention to finding alternative words for the ordinary words your child uses everyday.

Synonyms are words that have the same or almost the same meanings; **antonyms** are words that have opposite meanings. These two terms suggest still more ways to help your child organize words into logical groupings. Synonyms are related by their *similarity* of meaning, and antonyms stand in *contrast* to one another. In the first grade, children are introduced to pairs of words that mean essentially the same thing (*big, large*) and to other pairs of words that mean the opposite (*big, little*). In later grades they are introduced to the terms *synonyms* and *antonyms*.

Synonyms and antonyms can help to define words that are unfamiliar. When a new word is encountered, it can often be understood more fully if it is related to a familiar word whose meaning is very similar or is the opposite. For example, if something is *colossal*, it is not just *large*; it is *huge*, *enormous*, *gigantic* (even *stupendous*). It is also the opposite of *small*, *tiny*, or *insignificant*. You can choose the words that are appropriate for your child.

Look at these familiar synonyms and antonyms, and then help your child discover even more examples:

Synonyms	Antonyms
start, begin	off — on
sad, unhappy	up — down
odd, unusual	stop — start
ask, request	slow — fast
answer, reply	bright — dark
calm, still	light — heavy
jump, leap	question — answer

The search for synonyms and antonyms is an excellent vocabulary-building activity because it encourages children to discover several different ways of expressing a thought or idea. For example, instead of simply saying "I was *mad* at him," it is possible to say "I was *angry* with him" (or *furious* or *annoyed* or *exasperated*). Both the dictionary and the thesaurus can provide information on synonyms and antonyms; these will be discussed in week 12.

Word games can be built around synonyms and antonyms. For example, you can give a familiar word and ask your child to think of at least one other word that has the same or the opposite meaning. In some cases it may be possible to think of several synonyms (*big, large, huge, enormous*) and their antonyms (*little, small, tiny, microscopic*).

❖ Master Sound-Alikes (Homophones)

As you have seen, it helps to discover ways to arrange related things into logical groupings. In English there are many sets of words that have the same sound but have different spellings and meanings: *see* and *sea*; *hear* and *here*; *to*, *too*, and *two*, for example. These words, called **homophones** (same sound), can be grouped according to sound; then they can be contrasted according to spelling and meaning. Children begin to become familiar with homophones in the earliest grades, and they can continue to expand their vocabularies by learning new words that sound like more familiar ones (*seen-scene* or *sight-site-cite*, for example).

There are many words that have multiple uses, that is, they have one spelling but more than one meaning. For example:

The *bear* lumbered into the woods.
I can't *bear* to see him suffer.

Throw the garbage into the *pit*.
He likes to *pit* one person against another.

Words that look alike but have different meanings are called **homonyms.**

Some homophones seem to be difficult for children to learn. The *to-too-two* group is especially troublesome. Make sure your child understands which spelling and meaning applies in each of these situations:

To is often used as a *preposition* followed by a noun. It often means "toward" or "in the direction of" something.

Dad gave me a ride *to* school.

To is also used before a *verb*.

I like *to* ride my skateboard.

Too can mean "more than enough." It is often followed by *many* or *much*.

Don't try to carry *too* many boxes.

I ate *too* much and got sick.

Too can mean "also." When it is used this way, *too* often comes at the end of the sentence, preceded by a comma.

When I left for school, my dog wanted to come, *too*.

Two is the spelling for the numeral **2**. It is never used in any other way. When you use *two* in a sentence, it is usually spelled out (not written as the numeral **2**).

Two of my friends met me at the ball game.

Another difficult group of homophones is *there*, *their*, and *they're*:

There is often used as an adverb that tells *where* something is. It means "in that place" or "in that direction."

Look for the ball over *there* in the bushes.

We quickly ran *there* to see what had happened.

There can also be used to begin a sentence.

There is no more milk in the refrigerator.

There are two more cookies left.

Their is a possessive pronoun. It is used to show that something belongs to two or more people.

Both of my friends left *their* books on the bus.

They're is a contraction for *they are*.

They're going to the game tomorrow.

Here are some other homophones often encountered in the elementary grades:

ate, eight	bare, bear
base, bass	berry, bury
blew, blue	brake, break
buy, by	eye, I
flour, flower	for, four
hear, here	hole, whole
hour, our	its, it's
knew, new	knight, night
know, no	one, won
peace, piece	right, write
sail, sale	sea, see
son, sun	stair, stare
tail, tale	threw, through
waist, waste	wait, weight
way, weigh	weak, week
wood, would	your, you're

In the intermediate grades, children will discover more challenging homophones such as these:

aisle, I'll, isle	away, aweigh
bolder, boulder	bridal, bridle
cereal, serial	choral, coral
chorale, corral	cite, sight, site
coarse, course	complement, compliment
core, corps	council, counsel
dual, duel	foreword, forward
guessed, guest	hangar, hanger
loan, lone	manner, manor
miner, minor	patience, patients
principal, principle	rain, reign, rein
scene, seen	stationary, stationery
throne, thrown	vain, vane, vein

Help your child distinguish between these homophones by talking about the meaning of each word, by pointing them out when they are encountered in reading, and by using them in sentences.

Week 3

Learn Important Prefixes

In week three ask your child to explore the structure of words. Start with simple prefixes and expand from there.

Prefixes are syllables added at the beginning of words:

even, uneven

agree, disagree

Prefixes are not complete words themselves, but they are important because they affect the meaning of the word that follows.

You just saw prefixes added to *even* and *agree*, which are examples of **base words**. Base words *are* complete in themselves and give the essential meaning

of the word before anything else is added: *fair*, *fold*, *like*, *read*, and so on. Prefixes can be used to change the meaning of base words, as in *agree* and *disagree*.

Children can be introduced to the most familiar prefixes through the creation of antonyms, especially those in which the prefix changes a word to the *negative* of its original meaning. The prefix *un-*, for example, means "not" or "the opposite of something." It is often added to adjectives to create other adjectives with the opposite meaning:

easy	uneasy
fair	unfair
happy	unhappy
lucky	unlucky
pleasant	unpleasant

The prefix *un-* can also be added to verbs. In the following examples, the second verb in each pair means "to do the opposite" of the first verb:

fold	unfold
load	unload
lock	unlock
tie	untie
wrap	unwrap

The prefix *dis-* also means "not, the opposite of." It, too, can be added to adjectives or verbs.

like	dislike
obey	disobey
appear	disappear
loyal	disloyal
honest	dishonest

The prefix *re-* is often used with verbs to show that something is done *again*.

use	reuse
build	rebuild
play	replay
read	reread
start	restart

The prefix re- can also suggest the idea of moving *back*.

rebound
refund
reclaim
recollect
retrieve

Here are some other familar prefixes often encountered in the early and middle grades:

in-, im-, il-, ir- (not, without): incorrect, improper, illegal, irregular

mis- (wrong, bad): mislead, misunderstand, mispronounce

non- (not; the opposite of): nonsense, nonfiction, nonstop

pre- (before): prewar, precook, prejudge

post- (after): postwar, postdate

It is also possible to add prefixes to other word parts that are not base words; that is, they are not complete English words in their own right. These words (such as *prepare* and *postpone*) involve *roots* taken from other languages. You will find more about word roots in Week 8.

THE PREFIX GAME

Give a base word and have your child think of a prefix that can be added (*lock – unlock*). Make sure that the meaning of the base word and the meaning of the new word are both clear. Your child can also check the dictionary to find more information about prefixes: they are listed as separate entries, and the prefix always ends with a hyphen (*dis-*). In this way it is possible to distinguish between the word *post* and the prefix *post-*, for example.

Let Word Endings Help (Suffixes)

Activities for the fourth week build on the ideas learned in the third. Once again we are adding something to a word to change or enhance its meaning. We are building meaning.

Suffixes are syllables added at the end of words: *help*, *helper*; *govern*, *government*; *luck*, *lucky*, *luckily*. Suffixes are not complete words, but they do affect the way a word is used in a sentence. Suffixes change a base word into a new part of speech: *help* is a verb, *helper* is a noun.

For example, the suffix *-ful* can be used to change nouns or verbs to *adjectives*. This suffix means "filled with something" or "able to do something." (Notice that the suffix *-ful* is spelled with only one *l*, while the word *full* has two *l*'s.)

cheer, cheerful
color, colorful
forget, forgetful
joy, joyful
peace, peaceful

The suffix *-less* can also be added to nouns or verbs to form adjectives. It means "without" or "something that does not."

cloud, cloudless
fear, fearless
spot, spotless
weight, weightless
worth, worthless

In some case, either *-ful* or *-less* can be added to the same base word. When this is done, the pairs of words form antonyms.

careful	careless
fearful	fearless
helpful	helpless
hopeful	hopeless
restful	restless
useful	useless

Now we will look at some more suffixes that create adjectives. These will be followed by suffixes that form nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Because suffixes are consistently used to form certain parts of speech, your child can better understand them by studying them in groups such as those given below.

❖ Adjective-Forming Suffixes

-able and ***-ible*** mean "capable of being." These suffixes often change verbs to adjectives:

love, lovable	sense, sensible
use, usable	collapse, collapsible
read, readable	permit, permissible

-ic and ***-ish*** mean "resembling in form; derived from; in the manner of." These suffixes often change nouns to adjectives.

hero, heroic	graph, graphic
boy, boyish	child, childish

-ive means "tending toward" the action of the verb which is the base word.

act, active	select, selective

-ous means "possessing, full of." This suffix is used to change nouns to adjectives.

fame, famous	danger, dangerous
joy, joyous	peril, perilous

-y means "showing, suggesting."

fun, funny	luck, lucky
ease, easy	grime, grimy

❖ Noun-Forming Suffixes

-er and ***-or*** are added to verbs to create nouns. These nouns name the person or thing (the *agent*) performing the action of the verb.

begin, beginner	act, actor
follow, follower	elevate, elevator
lead, leader	govern, governor

run, runner	invent, inventor
swim, swimmer	sail, sailor

Sometimes the *-or* suffix is found in words such as those listed below. Here the suffix is not added to a separate base word, but these words still name someone who *does* something or *is* something:

ancestor, author, doctor, mayor, pastor, sponsor

-ability and ***-ibility*** mean "the tendency to act or be acted upon." These are variations of the adjective suffixes *-able* and *-ible*.

usable, usability	possible, possibility
readable, readability	flexible, flexibility

-ment (act or result of doing something): often changes a verb to a noun.

employ, employment	entertain, entertainment
govern, government	amaze, amazement

-ness (condition, state of being): often changes an adjective to a noun.

happy, happiness	dark, darkness
hard, hardness	soft, softness
close, closeness	heavy, heaviness

-ant and ***-ent*** name the person or thing that performs an action.

assist, assistant	depend, dependent
attend, attendant	correspond, correspondent

The related suffixes ***-ance*** and ***-ence*** name the quality of something or the process of doing something.

assistance	dependence
attendance	correspondence

-ion changes verbs to nouns that name the act or result of doing something:

locate, location	discuss, discussion
extend, extension	describe, description
accuse, accusation	identify, identification

Notice that the ending of the verb may change considerably before *-ion* is added (*describe, description*).

-ism refers to the act or process of doing something, and ***-ist*** refers to one who does something or specializes in something.

hero, heroism	manner, mannerism
piano, pianist	science, scientist

-ity means "quality or degree."

human, humanity	intense, intensity

-ment indicates the act or result of doing something:

pay, payment	refresh, refreshment

-ness indicates a condition or state of being:

happy, happiness	still, stillness

❖ Verb-Forming Suffixes

-ate means "to become or cause to become." It is used at the end of a great many verbs.

locate	calculate
graduate	inflate
vibrate	illustrate

-ify means "to cause or make." It is often added to nouns or adjectives to change them to verbs. Sometimes the spelling of the base word has to be adjusted to accept this suffix.

beauty, beautify	clear, clarify
just, justify	pure, purify

-ize **means "to make or cause to become."**

apology, apologize	civil, civilize
memory, memorize	popular, popularize

❖ The Adverb-Forming Suffix *-LY*

The most common adverb-forming suffix is ***-ly***, which means "in a specific manner." It is often added to adjectives to create adverbs:

quick, quickly	soft, softly
slow, slowly	easy, easily
sad, sadly	lazy, lazily

Use the preceding examples to show how suffixes affect the words to which they are added. Ask your children to *use* each word in a sentence, because it is through actual use that they will gain power over words and will expand their writing vocabulary. Also ask them if they can think of other words that have the same suffixes as the words shown above.

As children practice writing suffixes, they can also practice using a dictionary to be sure that the base words and the suffixes they choose are correct and can be combined to form new words. Most dictionaries list suffixes as separate entries, preceded by a hyphen (*-ness*, *-ly*). In this way, students can distingish between individual words (such as *able* or *less*) and suffixes that are spelled the same way (*-able*, *-less*).

The Suffix Game

Give your child a base word to which a suffix can be added (*luck – lucky; dark – darkness*) Some words can take more than one suffix (*use, useful, useable, usability*). You can also give a word that already has a suffix and ask your child to explain how the word is constructed and what the two parts of the word mean. For example, *employment* is built on the verb *employ*; when the suffix *-ment* is added, the word becomes a noun meaning "the condition of being employed."

Learn Groups of Related Words

This week turn your attention to the common elements in words. Search for similarities as a way of better understanding the differences that prefixes, suffixes, and inflections make.

Related words are built on the same base. They differ primarily in their use of prefixes and suffixes:

act activate
action activity
active react, and so on.

Although the parts of speech change, the meaning of the word *act* is implicit in each of these related words.

Students learn more and more words as they move through the grades, but they do not always understand

how simple words are related to more complicated forms of the same words. The following list shows the grade level (in parentheses) at which certain words are understood, followed by the grade at which related forms of the same words are understood (from Dale and O'Rourke, *Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary*, p. 183). You can see that there is a gap of six to eight years in most cases.

active (4)	activate (12)
break (4)	breakage (10)
note (4)	notation (10)
real (4)	reality (10)
simple (4)	simplify (8)

When we see how long it takes for children to understand that these pairs of words are related, we are reminded that we can *encourage* vocabulary growth, but we should not try to hurry it.

Suffixes are especially important in creating groups of related words. Because they change the part of speech (and thus the way the word is used), suffixes permit a number of words to be derived from a single base. Show your child that some words do not change their spelling when suffixes are added:

detect - detective	connect - connection
break - breakage	govern - government
comfort - comfortable	joy - joyful

A number of other words do change their spelling. Often the final *e* is dropped or some other letter is substituted at the end of the base word to make pronunciation easier:

use - usable	decide - decision
locate - location	simple - simplify
pure - purify	persuade - persuasive

The following exercises can help your child understand how suffixes can be used to formulate groups of related words:

- Give some familiar base words that are verbs and ask for suffixes that change each word to a noun. In the early grades, you may want to provide a list of suffixes as well as a list of base words so that the child can see the possibilities.

Suffixes To Choose From	Verbs	Nouns	(Answers)
-er	elect	_____	(election)
-ion	help	_____	(helper)
-ance	enjoy	_____	(enjoyment)
-ment	sail	_____	(sailor)
-or	perform	_____	(performance)

- With older children, you may want to give only the list of verbs without showing the suffixes. This may require children to refer to the lists of suffixes in Unit 4. Use these words in sentences if the child does not understand the related word form.

Verbs	Nouns	(Answers)
invent	_____	(invention)
"	_____	(inventor)
adjust	_____	(adjustment)
consume	_____	(consumer)
impress	_____	(impression)
depend	_____	(dependence)
"	_____	(dependent)
"	_____	(dependability)

- Give some nouns and verbs that can be changed to adjectives with the addition of suffixes such as *-y*, *-ous*, *-ful*, *-less*, *-able*, *-ible*, and so on.

Nouns or Verbs	Adjectives	(Answers)
foam	_____	(foamy)
break	_____	(breakable)
fame	_____	(famous)
pity	_____	(pitiful)
create	_____	(creative)
cloud	_____	(cloudless)
force	_____	(forcible, forceful)
danger	_____	(dangerous)

- Give a few nouns and adjectives that can be changed to verbs by adding suffixes such as *-ate*, *-ify*, and *-ize*.

Nouns or Adjectives	Verbs	(Answers)
solid	_____	(solidify)
design	_____	(designate)
modern	_____	(modernize)
simple	_____	(simplify)
pulse	_____	(pulsate)
sympathy	_____	(sympathize)

You can reinforce the meaning of related words by using them in sentences which say the same thing in slightly different ways. This will be especially helpful with younger children. For example:

> This design is not *simple* enough. We must *simplify* it even more.
>
> There were no *clouds* at all. The sky was *cloudless.*
>
> Anna is interested in *science.* She wants to be a *scientist* someday.

Discover the Power of Word Analogies

This week you can move vocabulary growth in a playful and challenging direction—through analogies.

Michael Jordan is to basketball as
Michael Jackson is to _____.

Analogies are statements which show a particular relationship between pairs of words. Analogies require children not only to know the meanings of words but also to think about ways in which words are logically related.

Analogies are often built on *synonyms*. The first two words present one pair of synonyms; the next two words should follow the same pattern and present another pair of synonyms.

word A is to *synonym of A* as

word B is to *synonym of B.*

When you are working on analogies, leave a blank space for the last word:

big is to *large* as *little* is to _____

Now help your child fill the blank space with a word that is a synonym of *little:* the most obvious choices are *small* or *tiny.*

When your child has become familiar with analogies, you can present them in a briefer form. A colon (:) can represent the words "is to," and a double colon (::) can represent the word "as." Here are some more analogies involving synonyms:

glad : happy :: sleepy : (tired)

easy : simple :: opened : (closed)

start : begin :: finish : (end)

A similar pattern works for antonyms:

word A is to *antonym of A* as

word B is to *antonym of B.*

big : little :: fast : (slow)

up : down :: in : (out)

soft : hard :: before : (after)

first : last :: hot : (cold)

As a variation, you can suggest several words that might fit the final blank space. This will require your child to know the meaning of all the words in order to pick the right one.

fast : slow :: dry :

a. funny b. big c. wet d. quick

Analogies can be used to demonstrate other kinds of relationships as well:

glass : smooth :: stone : (rough)
hand : glove :: foot : (shoe)
time : clock :: date : (calendar)
fish : water :: bird : (sky)

In these examples, the child must discover what relationship is established in the first pair of words. Then the second pair must conform to the same pattern.

Here is another pattern on which analogies can be built:

general word A is to *specific example A* as
general word B is to *specific example B*.

(Example) tool : hammer :: food:

The answer could be any specific type of food: bread, fish, carrot, lettuce, etc. Here are more examples:

color : red :: flavor : (chocolate)
bird : robin :: dog : (collie)
animal : bear :: fish : (salmon)

You can use analogies to expand vocabulary by having your child think of *several* words that might fill the final space. This works especially well with some verbs and descriptive words; you can refer to a thesaurus for more possibilities. Several possibilities exist in this analogy:

good : bad :: cold :

The obvious answer is *hot*, but other possibilities include *steaming*, *sizzling*, *fiery*, *torrid*, or other words

that are the opposite of *cold*. As a variation, help your child find more precise words that could be used to replace *all* of the general words in the preceding analogy:

excellent : terrible :: frigid : torrid

More challenging analogies can be used to expand your child's vocabulary even further. For example, you can give some words that may be unfamiliar and have your child find the meaning (or meanings) of each word in the dictionary. Then formulate analogies that use these unfamiliar words as the final terms.

For example, have your child find definitions for the words *arid*, *persist*, and *retrieve*. Then construct analogies based on synonyms or antonyms. Your child can decide which of these words fits the space at the end of each example.

misplace : lose :: recover : (retrieve)

stop : start :: discontinue : (persist)

moist : humid :: dry : (arid)

Analogy Challenge

Challenge your child to build analogy statements to stump you or other members of the family. The more you can prompt your child to think about words the more articulate he or she will become.

Use Word Maps to Define Words

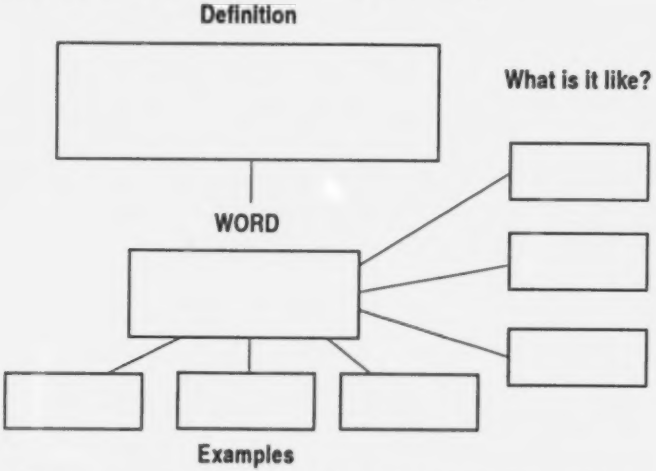
Many people are visual learners. They grasp ideas more quickly if they can see them represented in a visual form. This week take the time to play with word maps as a way of showing your children definitions, clarifications, and associations of important words.

A **word map** is a kind of diagram. It gives a graphic representation that focuses on three important things we need to know about any word:

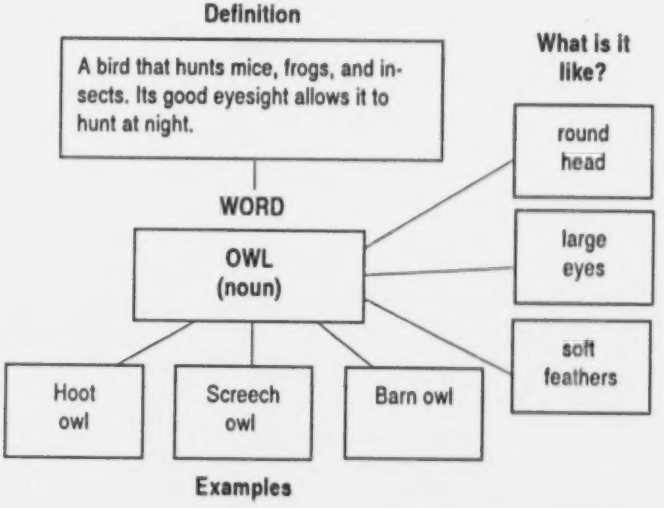
1. What *is* it? (definition)
2. What is it *like*? (descriptive terms; synonyms)
3. What are some *examples*?

Word maps can help students become familiar with new words. Maps of this type are often presented in school

textbooks, and you can employ the same technique to help your child understand new or difficult words. Here is one type of diagram used to create word maps:



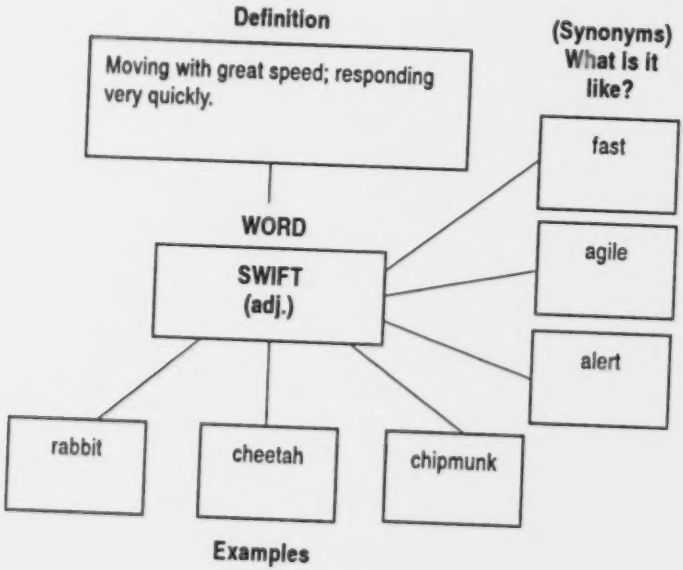
For instance, the word *owl* might be encountered in a story. Even though children may have a general idea of what an owl is, they can construct a word map to clarify and expand their understanding:



Follow through with questions such as these:

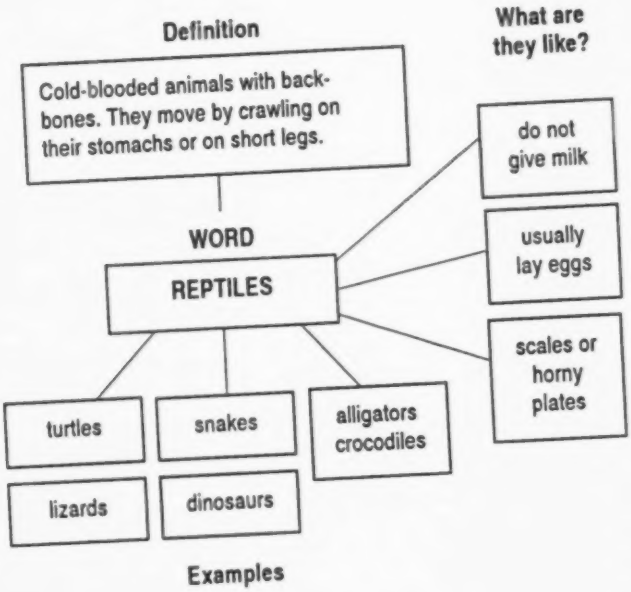
1. What is the significance of the round head? (ear placement helps the owl find its prey)
2. What is the value of the soft feathers? (silent flight)
3. What do you suppose owls do in the daytime? (sleep)

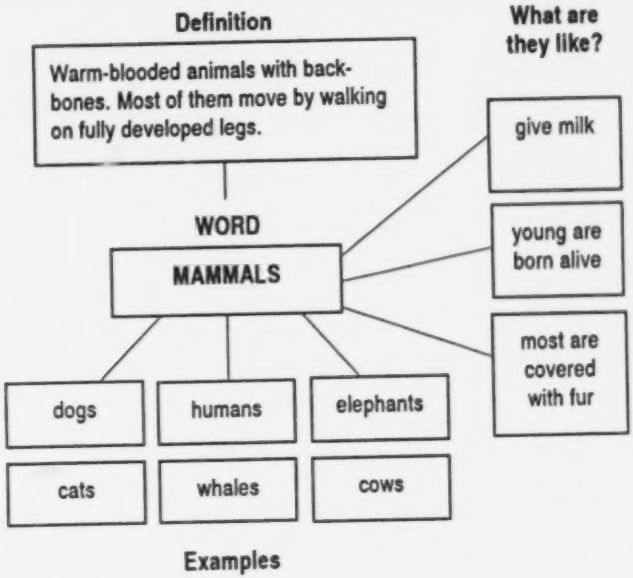
The same approach can help to clarify the meaning of words that *describe* rather than name people or animals or things. For example, if students encounter the adjective *swift*, they may know that it has something to do with rapid movement. A word map can help to define the word more clearly:



By listing other words that tell "what it is like," children become better acquainted with synonyms. Although synonyms rarely mean *exactly* the same, a combination of synonyms can help to define a word. By referring to the word *agile*, we see that *swift* means not only the ability to move rapidly but also the ability to move easily in different directions. In this way, students can see that a tennis player must move *swiftly* (the adverb form of *swift*) even in a small area, not just when he or she is running across the court. Also, if firemen make a *swift* response to a call, it means that they are *alert* and *ready* to move right away.

Word maps can also help children increase their understanding of words they may recognize but don't know very well. In the following examples, word maps are constructed to highlight the similarities and differences between *reptiles* and *mammals*.





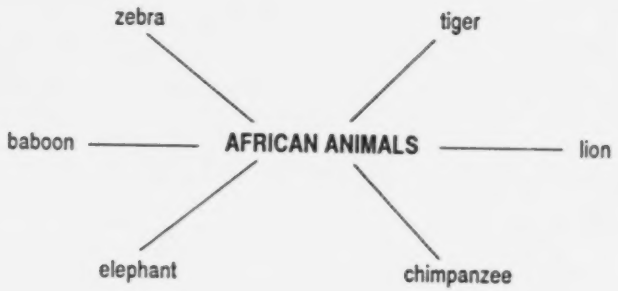
These word maps can also lead children to discover why a *whale* is a mammal and how it is different from various kinds of fish. They may also discover that the *platypus* is one of the few mammals that lays eggs.

Encourage your children to draw their own word maps as a way of defining and clarifying important words.

By constructing word maps, children come to realize that the definition of a word can be expanded to include other words that describe it. Often these words will be synonyms. The definition can also include *examples* of the thing.

❖ Expand through Word Webs

Another word map technique that can be used for expanding vocabulary is a word web. **Word webs** (also called *semantic maps*) help to organize related words around a central term or topic. Just like a spider's web, a word web has basic strands and linking fibers. You can see this in the following example, which focuses on *African animals*:



Word webs can be very effective because they help children grasp new information by relating it to things they already know. Word webs are often used in school and are especially valuable in subject areas such as science and social studies. As you saw in the preceding example, a word web is constructed by grouping related words around an important central term. Here is the procedure you can follow to help your child construct a word web:

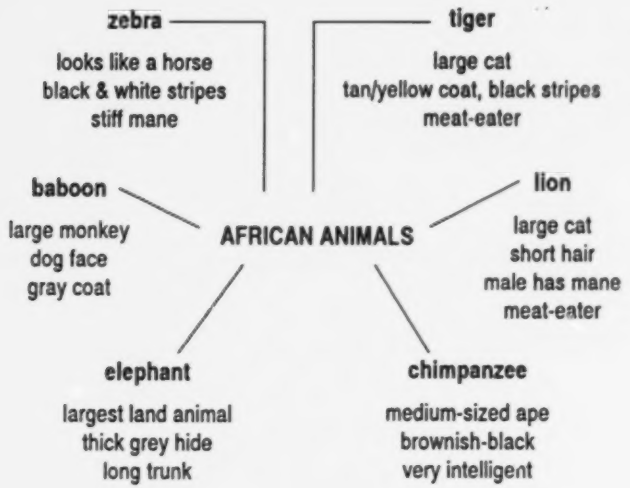
1. Choose a word or a topic of interest.
2. Write the word in the center of a page.
3. Help your child to think of other words that are related to the topic. As these words are written, they should be grouped in logical categories around the central term.

4. Talk about the words with your child. Focus especially on the reasons for grouping certain words into categories.

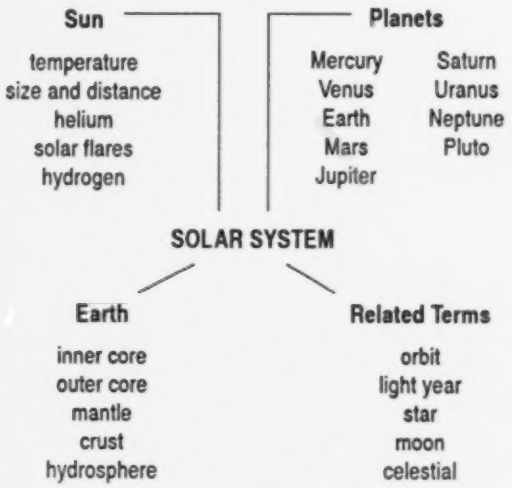
The last step is perhaps the most important. The word web itself serves only as a guide: it is not an end in itself. Encourage your child not only to become aware of new words but also to see relationships among words and even to discover new meanings in familiar words. It is the follow-up discussion that makes word webs so valuable because it requires children to think and to become *actively involved* in learning, not merely to fill in blanks on a worksheet.

❖ Use Word Webs for Reading

Word webs can be used *before* children read a selection to help organize their knowledge of the subject. Then, *after* the selection is read, the web can be checked for accuracy and can be expanded to relate new information to old. For example, if you and your child are going to read a selection about wild animals in Africa, you might begin with a simple web such as the one shown earlier. Then, after reading, your child should be able to add more details about each animal.



The next example deals with the *solar system*. As you can see, some of the words included here are appropriate for children in elementary grades; others are better suited for later grades. You can choose the words that best suit your child.



Further discussion could develop along these lines:

1. In a dictionary designed for high-school or college students, look for the word *star*. Find the Greek word from which *star* has evolved, and then investigate the entry for *astr-* (*astro-*) in the dictionary. Find out what an *asteroid* is, and see why space travelers are called *astronauts*. Can you think of any other words involving the root *astr-*?
2. Discover the meaning of the components in the word *hydrosphere* (see entries for *hydr-* and for *sphere* in more advanced dictionaries). What other words involve the root *hydr-*?

Word maps and word webs are valuable because they require students to *work* with ideas and definitions and to formulate their own conclusions. By making the effort to understand words and to find relationships, children remember much more than they would if they simply memorized a given definition or word list. Encourage your children to use word maps and other graphic techniques to build interest in their reading and their studying.

Use Roots for Basic Meanings

During this week focus on word roots as a way to understand a wide array of words.

Today's English vocabulary contains thousands of words that originated in other languages. In particular, Latin and Greek have provided many of the word roots (as well as prefixes and suffixes) we use every day.

A **root** is part of an English word that has been taken from a word in another language: it is not a complete word in its own right. In order to be usable in English, a root must be combined with prefixes, suffixes, or other word parts to form complete words.

❖ Latin Roots

Many English words are built on roots taken from the Latin language spoken more than 2,000 years ago. For example, the Latin word *ducere* means "to lead." The root *duc-* was combined with other elements to form a number of words in Latin, and many of these words have made their way into English: con**duct**, re**duce**, pro**duce**, e**duc**ate, and so on.

Here are some other Latin words and their original meanings, followed by English words containing the Latin root:

facere (to make, to do): fac**t**ory, manufac**t**ure, bene**fac**tor

mittere, *miss-* (to send): ad**mit**, per**mit**, mis**s**ile

portare (to carry): **port**able, im**port**, ex**port**

scribere, *scrip-* (to write): **scrib**ble, manu**scrip**t, in**scrip**tion

specere (to see): **spect**acle, **spect**ator, in**spect**

> **Help your children to think of other words that use the same roots. Obviously this kind of search many not be appropriate for all children; it needs to be adjusted to the age and experience of each child. Older children can often help younger ones to search for words that fit the pattern.**

All of the preceding Latin words are verbs. A number of other Latin words have also provided the roots for many English words. Here are a few examples:

bene (good): **benefit, beneficiary, benevolent**

mal (bad): **malice, malady, malignant**

manus (hand): **manual, manipulate, manuscript**

pes, ped- (foot): **pedal, pedestal, pedestrian**

sub (under, beneath): **submarine, subject, suburb, subordinate, substitute**

super (above, beyond): **superior, supervise, superfluous**

trans (across, over): **transport, transmit, transfer**

❖ Latin Prefixes

In Latin, a number of independent words were also used as prefixes; they continue to be used as prefixes in English today. Two of the most important of these are the Latin words meaning "in" and "out."

in (in, into): include, inhale, insert, involve
(also spelled *im*: import, immerse, immigrate, implant)

ex (out of, away from): exclude, exhale, export, expel

In some English words, *in-* is also used as a prefix meaning "not" (similar to the prefix *un-*). Its spelling changes to match the letter at the beginning of the word to which it was attached: *il-*, *im-*, and *ir-* are most often used. These *absorbed prefixes* (also called *assimilated prefixes*) are found in words such as:

incorrect, inactive, inconvenient
illegal, illogical, illegible
immature, impartial, impatient
irrelevant, irregular, irrational

The Latin words *ad* (to, toward) and *cum* (with, together) are often used as prefixes. These also changed their spelling to fit the following word.

ad is absorbed by changing its spelling to *ac-*, *af-*, *ap-*, *as-*, or *at-*:

advance, admit, admire, adjust
accomplish, accommodate, account, acquire, acquaint
afford, affect, affirm, afflict
appear, appoint, apply, approach
assume, ascend, assemble, assign
attain, attend, attract, attempt

cum is most often used in English in the absorbed forms *com-*, *col-*, or *con-*:

combine, commit, comprehend, complex
collect, collapse, collaborate
connect, conserve, consider, consist

Sometimes we can clearly see the original meaning of these prefixes in present-day words. For example, *adhere* means "to stick *to* something," and the verb *compound* means "to join one thing *with* another." However, even though it is important to understand the meanings of Latin roots and prefixes, we must not assume that the original meanings are always evident in present-day English.

For example, we do not find the exact meaning "to" in every word beginning with *ad-* (*admire*) or see the meaning "with" in every word beginning with *com-* (*complain*). This is because some words have changed their meanings over the centuries. Words change and that keeps the language alive, but it is helpful even then to know the origin of these words.

❖ Greek Roots

The Greek language is even older than Latin and is the source of many Latin words. Greek has also contributed many words directly to the English language.

Here are some word elements taken from Greek roots and used in English words:

geo- (from *gē*, the earth): geography, geology, geometry

graph- (from *graphein*, to write): graph, graphic, telegraph, phonograph, biography

-logy (from *logos*, word or thought): biology, ecology, zoology, psychology
(The suffix *-logy* is used to indicate the study of a certain subject or the body of knowledge about that subject.)

micro- (from *mikros*, small): microscope, microphone, microfilm, microwave

photo- (from *phōs*, light): photograph, photocopy, telephoto, photoelectric

More Greek and Latin words will be discussed in the following unit.

Young children are not expected to deal with the complexities of language history or to memorize changes from Latin to English. The reason for looking at these words is simply to show how a number of Latin words have been adapted to the English language. Often we can better understand these words if we know the meaning of the roots on which they are built. You can follow up on this knowledge by having children search for similar words in the books they read and to encourage them to add to their list of Latin and Greek roots.

Week 9

Grow through Word Families

This week enlarge your scope to include all kinds of word families.

Word families are groups of words linked by some common element such as a root: ***import***, ***export***, *trans-**port***, and ***port**able,* for example. Each word in a family may have a distinctive meaning, but the *root* remains constant in all of them.

The Latin and Greek roots you saw in the preceding pages are often encountered in word families. Here are additional examples of word families based on roots from some of the Latin words mentioned earlier: *facere* (to make), *mittere* (to send), and *specere* (to see, look at). Words such as these appear in reading material for intermediate grades:

fac-: **factor, facile, facility, facsimile**

mit-, *miss-*: **emit, commit, mission, dismiss**

spec-: **speculate, respect, prospect, aspect**

The next examples show other word families built on Latin roots that we have not yet discussed. In some cases, the spelling of roots may vary in order to fit surrounding word elements.

capere (to take, seize) [*cap-*; *cep-*]: **capture, captive, accept, except, perception**

ferre (to carry): **transfer, prefer, refer, infer**

plicare (to fold) [*plic-*; *ply-*]: **complicate, implicate, apply, reply**

stare (to stand) [*stan-*; *stat-*]: **constant, status, stance, distant, substance**

Some of the Latin words you saw in Week 8 on word roots have reappeared here. For example, *trans* (across) combines with *ferre* (to carry) to give the word *transfer*: "to carry across." The word *sub* (under) combines with *stare* (to stand) to give *substance*. Also, the prefix *im-* (a form of the word *in*) is joined with *plicare* to give *implicate*: if someone is implicated in a situation, then they have become "folded in" to that situation.

Other families are built on Greek words. Here are some complete Greek words from which English word families have grown:

bios (life): **biology, biography, bionic**

phōnē (voice, sound): **telephone, phonograph, phonics**

skopos (from *skeptesthai*, to see): **scope, telescope, microscope**

techn$\bar{e}$ (art, craft, skill): technical, technician, technology, technique

t$\bar{e}$*le* (far off): telephone, television, telescope

Many of these examples involve Greek word elements you saw at the end of the discussion of word roots. For example, *bios* (life) can be combined with *-logy* (from *logos*, meaning "words, thoughts, or knowledge") to give the word *biology*: knowledge about life. Students can readily see that a *biography* involves writing (*graphein*) about someone's life. The root *graph-* is also used in *photograph*, which can be considered as a kind of writing with light, and in *telegraph*, an instrument that can send writing a long distance away.

By combining *t*$\bar{e}$*le* with *skopos* we get *telescope*, an instrument that allows you to see something far away. A *telephone* carries sound over long distances. The word *television* combines the Greek *t*$\bar{e}$*le* with the Latin *vision-*, which comes from the Latin verb *videre* (to see). The familiar word *automobile* combines elements from both languages: the Greek *auto-* (meaning "same, self") and the Latin *mobilis* (from *mov*$\bar{e}$*re*, "to move"). An *automobile* is obviously a vehicle that can *move* by *itself*, with no outside help.

If children try to memorize a new word out of context, or if they simply look up a new word when it appears, they are not likely to remember much about the word. Instead of allowing your child to take such a hit-or-miss approach, show that many words can be grouped into families. Challenge your child to make lists of word families, perhaps in competition with lists that you produce yourself.

Find Specific Words

During the tenth week emphasize precision through the use of words that carry technical meaning. As students move into the middle grades, their writing often requires **specific words** that have fairly narrow definitions and thus give precise information. This is evident in the following composition, written by a fifth-grade student:

Should English Be The Official Language of the U.S.

English should be the official language. It always has been the official language. A lot of people know English and are comfortable with it. They should keep it that way. A lot of people want it to be the official language, and would feel unhappy and protest if it was changed.

It would be very hard on teachers. Trying to teach the kids the language. It would also mean larger classes. Everything would be very confusing!

It would be difficult and expensive for the schools. It would cost a lot of money to buy all the extra supplies. You would have to put signs up everywhere. For restaurants, for street signs, and for signs on almost everything.

My Summary is that things should stay the way they are. It is a waste to change. Most people want and talk English so they would have to learn a different language. It is foolish to change.

Look at the number of words that carry specific meanings:

official	expensive
language	supplies
comfortable	restaurants
protest	summary
confusing	waste
difficult	foolish

Some of these words may not be used very often by most fifth-graders in everyday conversation (*official*, *protest*, *summary*); they are used here because of the topic chosen. The important thing is that they are used correctly (if not always spelled so). The student shows a clear understanding of the *meaning* of these words, and the meaning is employed in building a fairly logical argument in favor of making English the "official language," as the student calls it.

Here the effect of the argument is enhanced by the impact of very precise words: many people are *comfortable* with English; some would *protest* if it were changed; it would be *confusing* and *difficult* and *expensive* to make all the changes necessary; and so on. This is a particularly good example of the effective use of vocabulary at this grade level.

This composition also shows that good writing does not mean a self-conscious emphasis on impressive words such as *reluctant* or *mischievous* or *exaggeration* (all words that can be found in fifth-grade readers). Rather, it shows that the student has a good supply of specific words that are used effectively to support an argument.

The next composition, by a sixth-grader, also uses a fairly precise vocabulary.

Warfare

Why? What entered the human brain to make us senselessly destroy lives and property? Ever since the civilized world has been existent, they have torn lives apart, murdered, and destroyed for what reason? We have been frightened, tormented, and destroyed to the limit. Even those of us who chose not to engage in combat still live in fear of bombing raids, insane killers, and terrorist attacks on our innocent selves.

The reasons for fighting range from religious problems to greedy dictators wanting the earth for themselves. And now, a single button or turn of a key can destroy us all.

If we cannot prosper peacefully, there is no hope for our children.

Some of the noteworthy words in this paper are these:

senselessly	tormented
destroy	terrorist
property	innocent
civilized	greedy
existent	dictators

It is the *use* of these words that makes them significant. The student clearly knows what the words mean, and these words give weight to her argument by delivering specific meanings.

Aside from guiding children to use more specific words to enhance the effect of their compositions, there is no easy way to upgrade written vocabulary in the early and middle grades. Vocabulary development requires long-term work that branches out in many directions. You want to stimulate children's curiosity about words and encourage their interest in expressing thoughts as clearly and accurately as possible. Then, children will use word families, prefixes, suffixes, context, and dictionaries and thesauruses in their quest for the right word. It is a quest that demands all the techniques a person can manage.

Help your child look for opportunities to use specific, concrete words to support arguments or to create precise images. You can give examples to show what you mean, but ask your child to find the words that suit his or her own thinking. When you find general or fuzzy terms in your child's writing, ask for words that will clarify and make the idea more specific.

Mine the Wealth of Other Languages

Show your children the words found in this unit. See if they can find some of the words in their reading during the week.

In earlier weeks you saw that **Latin** and **Greek** have contributed many words to English. The **French** language has also been the source of many English words. Here we will look at a few more words that have come from these languages into English.

❖ Latin Words

The following list contains some familiar English words taken from Latin. In most cases, the spelling of the present-day English word is the same as the original Latin word. Sometimes the spelling or meaning of the

Latin word differs slightly from the present-day English word; these differences are shown in parentheses.

English	Latin
abdomen	-
actor	- (someone who does something)
animal	-
calendar	*calendarium* (account book)
campus	- (flat space)
census	-
circus	- (circle; racetrack)
color	-
credit	*credere* (to believe, entrust)
doctor	- (teacher)
elevator	*elevare* (to lift, raise)
error	- (wandering, wavering)
exit	*exitus* (going out)
favor	-
formula	- (shape, beauty, form)
fortune	*fortuna* (fate, luck, chance)
genius	- (guardian spirit)
gladiator	-
honor	-
horror	-
index	-
instructor	- (supervisor)
item	- (also; likewise; besides)
major	- (larger, greater)
minor	- (smaller, less)
plus	- (more)
prior	- (previous, preceding; better, superior)
radius	- (stick; spoke in a wheel)
refrigerate	*refrigerare* (to cool off, chill)
senator	-
stadium	- (race track)
superior	- (higher, upper; past, preceding)

terror -
vacuum - (empty, clear, free)
video - (from *videre*, to see)

The Latin words *et cetera* mean "and others; and so forth." The word *and* should not be added before *et cetera* because the Latin word *et* already means *and*. The Latin words *vice versa* are also still used today to mean "conversely; the other way around." We also use the Latin word *versus* (abbreviated *vs.*), which means "against."

The following Latin words and prefixes have been used in many English words relating to numbers:

unum (one): unit, union, universe, unify
bi- (two): bicycle, binary, biannual
tri- (three): tricycle, triangle, triple
quattuor (four): quart, quarter, quartet
quinque (five): quintet, quintuplets
octo (eight): octet, octagon, octopus
decem (ten): decade, decathlon

In the Roman calendar, the seventh month was **Septem**ber (*septem* = seven), the eighth was **Octo**ber, the ninth was **Novem**ber (*novem* = nine), and the tenth was **Decem**ber. These names have been retained in the twelve-month calendar we use today.

❖ Greek Words

Some complete Greek words have been taken into English, but the Greek language is even more important for providing many of the word *roots* on which English words are built. Many of these words are used in science in particular. Some words built on Greek roots were mentioned earlier in Week 8. Here are a few more Greek words that form the roots of many English words:

Greek	English
aster (star)	astronomy, asteroid, astronaut
atomos (indivisible)	atom, atomic
chaos (abyss)	chaos, chaotic
chorde (string)	chord
gala (milk)	galaxy (Milky Way), galactic
gramma (writing)	grammar, diagram, telegram
graphein (to write)	graph, graphic, autograph
hydor, *hydr-* (water)	hydrant, hydraulic, hydrogen
kirkos (ring)	circle
logos (word; reason)	logic, biology, psychology
metron (measure)	meter, diameter, thermometer
mikros (small)	microscope, microfilm
nautes (sailor)	nautical, nautilus, astronaut
phos, *phot-* (light)	photograph, phosphorous
polis (city)	politics, police, metropolitan
therme (heat)	thermal, thermostat, thermos

❖ French Words

Listed below are some French words we use fairly often. When there is a difference in spelling, the French word is given in parentheses. (French pronunciation is different from English, of course, even when the spelling is the same.)

active (*actif*)
avenue
bureau
catalog (*catalogue*, list)
chef
cruel
force
limousine
menu
piece
reservoir
table
amateur
baton
boulevard
certain
clear (*clair*, light, bright)
dinner (*diner*, to dine)
honor (*honneur*)
marriage (*mariage*)
number (*nombre*)
reason (*raison*)
subtle (*subtil*)
technique

Most students will know these words by the time they reach the intermediate grades; any unfamiliar ones should be added to their vocabularies.

By understanding that most of today's English words originated in other languages, your child can build a strong foundation for steady vocabulary development.

- **The *meaning* of many English words is found in the meaning of the original words or roots.**
- **The *structure* of English words involves combinations of meaningful elements, many of them taken from other languages. Words such as *subconscious* or *psychological* contain logical groupings of prefixes, roots, and suffixes taken from Latin and Greek and adapted to English.**
- **The *spelling* of many English words retains elements of the words in their original languages. This is why we have the /k/ sound spelled *ch* in words such as *chorus*, and the /s/ sound spelled *ps* in *psalm*: both words originated in the Greek language. This is also why words such as *reservoir* and *silhouette* have the spellings they do: they have been taken directly from the French language.**

Week 12

Use the Dictionary and Thesaurus

In the preceding units we have seen that language development begins with reading, listening, and writing. These activities create the need for expanding our vocabularies, and they provide the context in which words must be defined.

At some point, children will encounter words they can't figure out by using any of the techniques discussed in earlier weeks. When this happens, it is time to turn to the dictionary and thesaurus. These essential reference sources enable us to clarify and refine our understanding of word meanings. With them, we can look up a needed definition or we can search for a livelier word or one that better conveys our meaning.

❖ The Dictionary

Make sure that your child understands how the dictionary is organized; look at the first few pages of your dictionary to find comprehensive instructions. Dictionaries for elementary-grade students usually include some or all of the following features:

1. **Guide Words**: Boldfaced words at the top of the page showing the first and last word defined on that page.
2. **Main Entries**: Boldfaced words listed at the left side of each column of words.
3. **Definitions**: Meanings for each main entry. When there are several meanings, each one is numbered separately.
4. **Example Sentences**: These show how a particular meaning of the word is used.
5. **Parts of Speech**: These indications show that the word may be a noun, a verb, an adjective, or some other part of speech. When a word can function as more than one part of speech, example sentences will usually show how the word is used in each instance.
6. **Syllable Structure**: The word written with dots between syllables (**de • tec • tive**, for example). In some dictionaries the main entry shows syllable structure, but in other dictionaries this may be given at the end of the entry.
7. **Pronunciation**: An indication of the way the word sounds. Special symbols may be used to show how the vowels and some consonants are pronounced. These symbols will be explained in a **pronunciation key**, usually given at the bottom of each page. (Dictionaries for very young chil-

dren usually do not try to use separate phonetic markings to represent pronunciation.)

In order for younger children to use a dictionary, they must first understand the principles of alphabetical order. You can give lists of words to be arranged in alphabetical order, and of course the process should continue beyond the initial letter. Make sure that your child understands how to alphabetize to the second letter, the third letter, and so on.

You can also develop simple exercises that will make your child feel more at home with the dictionary itself. For example, you can provide a list of guide words and the pages on which they are found. These can be taken from any dictionary you have, or you can simply make up your own.

Guide Words	Page
afraid - again	14
before - beneath	21
chair - clear	32
fair - fly	43

Now give a list of words and have the child determine the page number on which each word can be found:

Word	Page	(Answer)
chance	____	32
after	____	14
below	____	21
fine	____	43
begin	____	21

❖ Syllabication

Dictionaries for elementary students usually give each main entry as a complete word; syllable structure may be shown at the end of the entry.

foliage The leaves on a tree or plant.
fo • li • age *noun.*

Dictionaries for students in intermediate and upper grades usually show the syllable pattern as part of the main entry. Students can approach new words with greater confidence if they understand how to use syllabication as an aid to word study.

In the first place, syllabication helps to clarify structure by showing how the individual elements of the word are joined in logical patterns. This is especially important with words of Latin or Greek origin. Furthermore, the original meaning of each word part sometimes contributes to present-day meaning, and spelling is also an integral part of word structure. For example, the word *commit* has a double *m* because it joins a prefix ending with *m* to a root beginning with *m*: *com-* + *mit*. The prefix is a form of the Latin word *cum* (with), and the root is taken from the Latin word *mittere* (to send). Even though this word does not literally mean "to send with" in present-day English, it can be better understood if we see how it was originally constructed.

Furthermore, students can learn that they do not have to "tackle" long, difficult words by holding their breath and plunging ahead, desperately hoping to guess the correct spelling. They can approach words in a logical manner and can learn their spelling (and meaning) by analyzing each syllable and seeing how it is joined with other syllables.

Elementary-level dictionaries can be helpful because they provide basic information in simple formats that allow children to become familiar with the process of locating things. However, the number of words in most elementary dictionaries is fairly limited. By about the fourth grade, you will probably want to look for dictionaries that are somewhat more advanced and that contain a larger number of words.

As you move to dictionaries for higher grade levels, you will find that more and more information is given with each entry. Sometimes this information shows how certain words can be used in *idioms*: phrases that have special meanings which go beyond the literal definition of each word ("under the weather"; "raining cats and dogs"). For example, the word *take* may also include information on the meaning of the idioms such as "take a back seat," "take care," "take it easy," take it from me," "take off," and "take the cake." Other information may relate to the history of the word, showing its origin and meaning in Greek or Latin or French or some other language.

It is easy to think that "using the dictionary" simply means looking up an unfamiliar word in order to understand a particular sentence. This may have some momentary value — comparable to looking up a phone number — but it is not the way we learn our most useful words or build a comprehensive vocabulary. Children will not learn how to understand words and will not increase their vocabularies if they approach the dictionary simply as an occasional source of information to help with isolated difficulties. Dictionaries *can* be very helpful when new words are encountered, but study of these words should not end when the dictionary definition has been located. Rather, these words should be analyzed, related to familiar words, and used

on a regular basis. Suggestions for such study are given below.

When using a dictionary, you and your child can refer to these guidelines and apply them as needed:

1. Check all the definitions of a word. Make sure you select the definition that fits the situation (context) you are dealing with.
2. Analyze the structure of the word. See if you can find individual word parts that contribute to its meaning. In particular, make sure you know the meaning of any prefixes or suffixes involved.
3. Focus on the meaning of word roots when they are present. For example, by knowing that the Greek root *therm-* refers to heat and that *meter* is derived from the Greek word *metron* (measure), you will know that a *thermometer* is a device for measuring heat. Furthermore, you will have a head start on words such as *thermal* and *thermostat*, and you will know how the *thermos bottle* got its name. You can also use your knowledge of the word *meter* when you encounter other words that name measuring devices (*speedometer*, *altimeter*, *barometer*).
4. Look at any antonyms or synonyms provided. These will often give you a more familiar word that provides a clue to the meaning of the new word.

❖ The Thesaurus

Many language-arts textbooks acquaint students with the *thesaurus*. This Latin word (from the Greek *thesauros*) originally meant "treasury" or "storehouse."

A thesaurus is indeed a treasury of words that will help children expand their vocabularies and write more interesting sentences.

Most modern thesauruses, especially those for younger children, are organized in alphabetical order so that students simply look for boldfaced headwords (as in a dictionary). After each headword, they find several synonyms and perhaps some other words of related meaning; sometimes a group of antonyms will be given as well.

For example, if your child wants to find other words that may be used in place of *walk*, then the word *walk* is located just as it would be in a dictionary. The thesaurus lists a number of words that convey the idea of *walking* but that also suggest other shades of meaning. Instead of simply writing "They *walked* across the street," your child can create more vivid images by writing "They *strolled* (or *marched* or *trudged* or *sauntered* or *shuffled*) across the street."

One obvious benefit of a thesaurus is to help younger children avoid the excessive use of overworked words such as *nice*, *go*, *get*, *big*, and *little*. A Saint Bernard is a *big* dog, but an elephant is a *huge* animal, and some whales can be so *enormous* that we can hardly believe they exist. As another example, consider the verb *look*. Instead of using this word over and over, children can find a number of other possibilities. Each of the following words suggests a slightly different way of *looking* at something:

observe: to look closely and carefully at something

glance: to look briefly at something

stare: to look at something for a long time

peek: to look at something from a hiding place

peer: to look closely and curiously at something

A thesaurus provides a variety of synonyms, of course, but it also allows students to find words whose meanings may be slightly different and more specific than general words. This will help children discover that synonyms seldom mean *exactly* the same as the original word, and it will also help them to increase their vocabulary as they become acquainted with a broader range of words of related meaning.

When children turn to the dictionary and thesaurus, they should view this as only one part of the learning process, not as an an end in itself. Students certainly do need to look up unfamiliar words when they are encountered, and you can show your child how much information there is to be gained by doing this. However, the greatest value comes with practice in *using* these words and absorbing them into a working vocabulary.

Ever Expanding

A twelve-week program in vocabulary building is not a stopping point. Rather, it's a starting point. The strategies in this book are just enough to prompt you and your child to see the opportunities that you have for expanding your vocabulary. By applying them regularly you will develop the habit of thinking about words, and of shining the light of your curiosity brightly on the world of words around you. To make this twelve-week effort pay off you need to think of it as a way of exploding your child's opportunities. You and your child are now alert to numerous ways that you can pique your curiosity about words.

No matter how large our storehouse of words, we can always increase and refine our ability to communicate by spotlighting some words and examining them for our personal use. Some people try to learn one new word each day. That technique seems particularly helpful for school use. The teacher who features one word a day actually turns that one word into many new words. As the class discusses a word and its uses, other new words pop into view.

One class of sixth graders, for example, found the word *galvanized* in a science text. Though it had a technical meaning for a way to protect metal, the students discovered other ways to use it and they learned other words as they examined *galvanized:*

> "The dynamic speaker galvanized the thinking of his entire audience. They listened with rapt attention to his plea for action."

By looking at other ways that *galvanized* could be used, this class expanded its knowledge of that one word and learned two others in the process—*rapt* and *plea*. The same thing will happen in your family as you ask questions about words, push your children to explore shades of meaning expressed in their books, and play with words for their power and their beauty.

In all that you do with words, remember that you are not trying simply to build a stack of words higher than your neighbor's pile; you are searching for ways to make life more comprehensible and to make it easier for your children to communicate accurately and effectively. Their success in school and in their future employment will be greatly enhanced by their vocabulary-building skills and activities.

To make curiosity about words a natural part of your child's thinking, you can't stop with one twelve-week effort. You want to make that curiosity a habitual part of his or her thinking. There are many ways to accomplish that end; you could buy other books on vocabulary development, for instance. Another way is to go back through this book—not immediately, of course, but after waiting a month or so.

Each week of this twelve-week program you explored a different strategy or technique for learning about words. Some of them were quite simple; others more complex. The point here is not to give a list of words to define, but rather to show you ways that you can think about words to make them more meaningful—to make your child a curious consumer of words. You may even want to paste the table of contents from this book on your refrigerator as a way of reminding you and your child of twelve ways to expand your vocabulary.

About the Author

Carl B. Smith, Ph.D., is a leading authority on reading and children's literature. A parent of four, and now a grandparent, he has a lifelong commitment to helping children and families develop their literacy skills in order to live more fulfilling lives.

Dr. Smith is founder and director of the Family Literacy Center, director of the federally funded ERIC Clearinghouse for Reading and Communication Skills, and professor of education at Indiana University in Bloomington. A former classroom teacher and reading specialist, he is senior author of the Macmillan Reading Program. Dr. Smith has written more than twenty books for teachers and parents. His recent titles include *Help Your Child Read and Succeed: A Parents' Guide* and *Elementary Grammar: A Child's Resource Book.*

Notes

Notes

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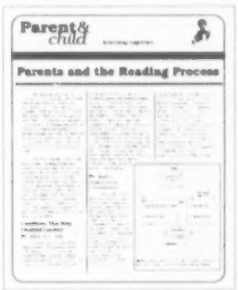

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